

## **The Freaks by Jancys-Blue-Bayou**

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**Summary:** "In any case, we just need a drummer, then we're all set to start getting gigs, so you wanna try out?" Does he want to try out? To be in a band with his old bully, who he's not sure can even play and who seems to have no real plan for the band who's last three drummers quit? Well, at least they have the space and equipment. And he's got nothing better to do. He may as well, at lea

## **The Freaks**

**DO YOU LIKE ROCK? DO YOU WANT TO MAKE MONEY? READ THIS!**

**KICK-ASS DRUMMER WANTED FOR ROCK BAND THAT WILL EXPLODE AND TAKE OVER THE WORLD**

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The flyer catches his eye for one reason and one reason only, the garish shade of orange it's printed on. Coupled with the black lettering it looks slightly Halloween-y, but it's January and this was put up today because it wasn't there when he got off his shift last night. He skims the ad quickly and though the text on it is ridiculous, he lingers. He's tried out for a few bands since he moved to the city in the fall but nothing's worked out so far. Most hadn't been serious enough for him, just a bunch of dudes fucking around with some instruments but being more interested in getting high than making music. There was one outfit a while back that was more serious like him, and he felt like they connected good enough, but they wanted him to bring his own drums which was a dealbreaker.

He used to have his own kit, after years of playing on the drums at the rec center and at the music hall at school (the teacher liked him and often let him stay late after to keep playing) he'd saved and saved to get his own kit, and when he got a little bit of the inheritance after Nana died when he was 14, he had enough for a used one. His mom drove him to Indy to pick it up. But he sold it when he was 16, when Will came down with a bad case of the flu and pneumonia and was in hospital for half the winter. Even though both he and mom worked extra shifts they didn't have enough to cover the hospital bills, so he sold it for a good price. Didn't tell mom about it until after.

Selling his drums didn't kill his pipe dream of one day becoming a musician though, and he kept playing at the rec center and school when he could. And he still had an old used acoustic guitar at home, though it had become more and more Will's as he'd taught his brother to play and Will showed much more natural talent at it than him. Ever since he was little he'd wanted to go to New York, study at NYU and meet cool people and join a punk band that would be the best, coolest, most important band in the world. His dad had smacked him over the head when he said that and told him he'd never amount to anything. His mom had always hugged him and told him he could do anything. He tried to hold onto his mother's optimism, though with time he'd gotten more realistic. He wasn't going to NYU, that became clear to him during high school. He could've probably gotten in actually, his grades were good, but he and his mom both knew that college, especially in New York, was too expensive.

He had been set on simply staying in Hawkins and working to help out at home, maybe save up enough so that Will could go to college instead. But his mom had been adamant that he'd do something with his life because "You're not staying in Hawkins. We'll miss you like crazy but I'm not having you waste away in this little town honey. You were always meant for bigger things." He's no longer sure what exactly those bigger things are, but after some more talking with his mom, he ended up moving to Chicago, after she encouraged him. Not for college, at least not right away, maybe next year when he's saved up more, but for now he's content with just working in the city, at the bar he got a job at first washing dishes but soon being put behind the bar some days, grill others; and to still somehow at least try and achieve his music dreams. He goes home to visit Will and mom every week, and sends money home every month.

So what makes him linger by the flyer is the line about drums being provided, and that they have their own studio. Nevermind the ridiculous opening line and garish color scheme then, if they have their own studio that's real serious then. He jots down the address on a piece of paper, he likes to have stuff on him he can write on. For those moments words and little sentences comes to him, for lines, lyrics, he for some reason jots down but never shows anyone.

"Hey Jonathan."

"Hey Jane, what's up?"

"Nothing much, did you see the flyer for the band?"

"Yeah, I might check it out after my shift."

"Might? You have to! This could be it."

"Alright, alright I will. We'll see how it goes."

The 15 year old girl, perched on her favorite barstool with a book on the counter in front of her, is as always looking out for him and his music "career". He likes Jane, she's sweet. She's the daughter of Terry, who owns/manages the place with her sister Becky. He really lucked out, meeting Becky. He came across her ad in the paper listing a room for rent and answered it. When he came by to look at it they got along well, he's always gotten along better with adults or kids than his peers. Becky was similar to his mom in some ways, not in many other ways but kind, tough and hard-working and of a similar background as his mom and him, which they related on. She rented him the room, and when he mentioned he was looking for jobs too she told him to come into the bar she was running with her sister. He's worked there for months now, doing a little bit of everything as it's a small operation. At first washing dishes and doing various handyman type stuff but soon being put in the kitchen too after Becky noticed him being a decent cook at home, and after Terry through a connection sorted out some license he'd been put behind the bar as well.

"What are you reading, school gave you homework over the break?"

"No, this is just for fun," she informs him and flips the book over to show the cover of *Pride and Prejudice*.

"Nice name. And book."

"Yes."

"Is your mom in the kitchen?"

"Yep. Auntie in the office."

"Alright, I'll be right out."

He goes into the back to hang up his coat and say hi to Terry and Becky. Terry's in the kitchen today, they switch around, while Becky handles more of the admin stuff and helps out where needed.

"Hey Becky."

"Hey Jonathan! Did you see the flyer for the band?"

"Yeah I saw. Did you see who put it up?"

"Some guy about your age. You should check it out."

"Yeah I will, already promised Jane so it's set in stone."

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Please pick up, please pick up, please pick up, she whispers to herself as she listens to the dial tone. The snow is really coming down now and she's gotten a firm introduction as to why Chicago is called The Windy City.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Barb!"

"Nancy?"

"Hey, how are you um, are you good are you home?"

"Uh, yeah I'm good, I'm home. Where are you? How are you, have you decided what you're gonna do about Columbia?"

"Yeah um, I dropped out."

"What? Wow, really?"

"And I'm uh, in a phone booth at uh, Union Station."

"You're in Chicago?!"

"Yeah um sorry I didn't call you before but I kind of panicked and got on the first train I could, I couldn't stay in New York, felt suffocating... also because they kicked me out of the dorms. So um,

sorry to spring this on you but what we talked about at Christmas uh... can I crash on your couch?"

"Of course Nance, I told you, you're always welcome."

"Thank you so much Barb, you're awesome. Best friend anyone could have."

"Don't sweat it, you always have my back so I have yours."

"Right. So uh, how do I get to your place from here?"

"Oh stay there I'll come get there, I have the car."

"Thanks, you're the best."

While she waits for Barb the same question that's been gnawing in her brain the whole train ride, reappears. What the hell is she doing? Is she screwing her life up forever? Will she regret all of this? She's already doubting her decision, like she's doubted everything she's done since autumn. She's not sure how she feels. One minute she's sure she's made a huge mistake, but the next she's reminded of what a sense of relief she got the moment she actually made the decision and dropped out.

College was not what she thought it would be. Or maybe she's not who she thought she was, who she's always been told she is, who she's made herself out to be. She's always been Nerdy Nancy. Good, studious, good girl Nancy. For as long as she can remember she's always been told she's good, that she's smart. Straight A student, always. She found school easy, especially when she was little. And she loved getting A's. It got her praise from teachers and her parents which always felt good, and it meant she was the best at something. She's always liked that, she's competitive like that. She's always worked hard in school for that, to keep the A's up, to keep being the best. In high school it became even more goal oriented. Because of expectations. She, and Barb, studied hard because that's what they'd always done, and now with college on the horizon it felt more important than ever. She was told it was more important than ever. Teachers expected her to do well and get into a great school, do well there and then go on and get a good job somewhere and so on. Her

parents expected it too. She expected it of herself too. She really wanted to meet those expectations. And she did. And then it all turned sour.

It felt like her whole life already laid planned out in front of her. That was the first of many realizations that hit her like a ton of bricks over the past months. That one specifically hit her after graduation, after she'd been valedictorian, after she'd been told by all her teachers what a great student she'd been and how she would succeed in college, and after her parents and relatives had gone on and on about how proud they were and how she would go on to college and then this and that. She smiled and nodded and answered politely while internally she panicked when she realized she could see like the next 20 years of her life laid out for her and apparently so could everyone else. She didn't want that, that suddenly struck her as scarily boring. She wanted... she don't know exactly, but something else, she wanted excitement and adventure, to not know... just what was going to happen.

She also realized that she would end up just like her parents, at the end of the cul-de-sac with a boring life. That's where the path she and everyone else had laid out for her eventually led. And nothing scared her more than the thought of turning into her parents.

And something that hit her hard when she got to Columbia in the fall that she didn't even know what she wanted to do there. She had done it, gotten into the prestigious college like she wanted, like her parents wanted. To study and become whatever she wanted but she didn't know what. In all the years of studying, she felt like she hadn't hit up on her "thing" yet. Not like Barb who had always been drawn to science, which is why it's no surprise she's now acing biology at Northwestern with the plan to later go on to med school, which she'll undoubtedly ace too. Nancy was good at science too, but not really that interested in it. She was good at all subjects. She liked history and social studies, and she really liked English. And she was good at math, and her dad has always steered her towards economics. Which is what she ended up enrolling at Columbia for.

It wasn't for her. It wasn't that it was too hard for her, she did alright even though college was more challenging than high school but she likes challenges. But it just wasn't for her. She thought about

changing her major, but didn't know what she'd rather study instead so she didn't. And then she hit a wall. It wasn't just classes. It was everything. College, New York, the future. She felt like she was drowning. She didn't want to go to class, but she hated staying in her dorm room too. She hated the dorms, all the people and the noise and shared spaces, and she didn't get on with her roommate, who saw her as a lame midwestern small town girl. Which she has to admit she pretty much is. Because she couldn't handle New York. Being in that huge city and not knowing anyone and not making any new real friends made her feel like the loneliest person in the world.

She's pulled out of her thoughts when Barb's Volkswagen pulls up by the curb. She hastily gets in the passenger seat, eager to escape the cold.

"Hey, you're a life saver," she greets her best friend and hugs her before tossing her bag into the backseat.

"Don't sweat it. Love the hair by the way."

"Really? I just went out and did it on a whim yesterday. Felt like I needed to change something."

"Yeah, you look good as a blonde. And I always said you could pull off bangs."

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

"So...?"

"So?"

"So... you dropped out, like officially, today?"

"Yeah... I made my mind up after we talked last night. And I did sleep on it, like you said I should."

"Good. How do you feel?"

"Terrified and worrying I just made a huge mistake."



"Good," Barb simply says as she turns left.

"Good?"

"Well, that's an improvement on how you felt before. Before you were miserable and depressed and *knew* you'd made a mistake, going there for econ. You hated it there Nance, you had to get out."

"I know I just... I don't know, what even is my life anymore?"

"Well, I don't know really. And you don't either and you said you didn't want to know?"

"No I said I didn't want to know my whole life ahead of time, the future but... fuck, what have I done? I don't know what I'm going to do? Why did I do this?!"

"I told you, because you were miserable and depressed and hated what you were doing. Don't make tell you a third time."

"Right, sorry. Sorry."

"It's alright."

"But what will I do now?"

"You will go home with me, you will eat my chicken soup to warm up and then we'll share a bottle of wine I have left over from New Years and talk more about this and then you will crash on my couch and in the morning we'll think more about what the hell your life is."

"Okay. Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

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After work he goes to the address listed on the flyer. It's a big nice brick building with several signs for different businesses, one of them with a faded sign reading Motor Row Records. He's never heard of it, never been here before, he knows the famed Chess Records is just a block over though. The door is open so he walks right in to find an empty front room. He can hear the muffled sound of a bass and a guitar though. Following the noise he walks down a hallway,

localizing it to a room at the end of it. He knocks on the door but there's no answer. Figuring they simply didn't hear him knock, he opens it.

There's two guys inside, a guitar player with his back turned towards the door, and a bass player facing him. He stands in the doorway listening for a few moments. The guitarist is struggling to keep up with the bass player and playing all over the place, to the bassist annoyance.

"Hey, uh excuse me but are you the guys auditioning drummers?"

The bass player looks up and stops playing, noticing him.

"Uh, yeah come on in," the guy answers. He's wearing a Ramones t-shirt and unkempt black hair.

As he walks in the guitarist turns around and looks at him. And it's the last person Jonathan thought he'd see in a studio with a guitar in his lap.

"Byers?!"

"Harrington?"

He figures he must look as surprised as Steve does as he stares at him. He hasn't seen Steve since high school, he graduated a year earlier but during senior year Jonathan would still see him around Hawkins, as King Steve didn't go to college. Word was he'd been counting on getting a basketball scholarship but lost it when he lost his place in the starting line up to the new kid Billy Hargrove during his senior year, and his grades and essay had been so bad not even Mr. Harrington's connections at IU had been enough. At least that's what Jonathan remembers overhearing, he never paid much attention to the gossip about it since he couldn't care less about Steve. He'd always been kind of an asshole. They were opposites, pretty much. Steve was the rich popular jock, the king of high school, while he was the weirdo freak from a broken home. Steve and his henchman Tommy used to bully him in middle school. It mellowed out in high school, though they still were assholes to him, especially Tommy, Jonathan was able to shrink into the background and stay clear of

them and mainly be left alone, though he knew they still talked about him behind his back and spread rumors. And another bit of high school drama he remembers is Steve kind of losing his crown as king of high school to that Billy kid, and he and Tommy having some falling out leading to Tommy following Billy around like a lapdog instead of Steve.

"Uh, hey!"

"Hey..."

"You know each other?" The bassist wonders.

"We went to high school together! Byers were... the year below me, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Damn I didn't know you moved to Chicago."

"I didn't know you played... or that you moved."

"Yeah it's been a while now um... so how are you man?"

"Good, um... you?"

"Good, good... uh, oh this is Mark, Mark this is Byers... I mean, Jonathan," Steve introduces.

"Hey man."

"Hey. So um... yeah, I saw your flyer at the bar... you need a drummer?"

"Yeah! I would've thought of you but I didn't know you were in the city."

"You guys played together in high school?" Mark asks.

"Oh, no I didn't really..." Steve mumbles.

"I didn't know you played," he reiterates.

"Yeah it's a more recent thing or... well my mom made me take music lessons when I was a kid but I quit it for basketball but yeah um... picked up again when I got here."

"Right, cool... this place is nice uh, isn't it expensive to rent?"

"Oh, yeah it would be but it's not really in business anymore. Company folded a year ago but we haven't gotten around to taking the sign down. My dad bought the building in the summer and no one's rented this part yet so I've been using it while I look after the place."

"Your dad owns the building?"

"Yeah! And when I didn't go to college my dad said I should get a job to 'learn how it is to live in the real world' and blah blah blah, and when I got fired from the video store he set me up here to take care of this place."

"Wow, so you're like the landlord of this whole place?"

"Uh... yeah, something like that..."

"Hah! Dream on Harrington, you're just the janitor!" Mark interjects.

"Hey shut up man, at least I have the keys to the place so we can play here!"

"Right so you work here... and started a band...?"

"Yeah or well, been trying to. We're still in the... trying to get this thing off the ground phase."

"Our last three drummers quit and we haven't played a real gig yet," Mark fills in.

"Well we're getting there, not my fault they quit!"

"Eh..."

"Hey if they didn't want to commit then we're better off without them."

"I mean, they raised some valid points... about your playing..."

"Hey I play just fine!"

"Okay um, can I ask uh... like, what are your plans like... why did you start a band?"

"I don't know, had the space and the equipment here and nothing better to do. And I've always wanted to be a rock star, so..."

"Right... what sort of music do you guys play?"

"It's kind of hard to describe..."

"I'm into punk stuff like the Ramones, Clash, F.E.A.R., Steve likes generic radio pop rock, so we try to meet in the middle kind of."

"Hey! I'm not generic. But what are you into Byers?"

"Punk, some new wave, post-punk, indie um... like what Mark mentioned, and stuff like Talking Heads, The Smiths, Television, Joy Division..."

"Sounds good," Mark nods.

"Don't know all those ones but sure!" Steve nods. "In any case, we just need a drummer, then we're all set to start getting gigs, so you wanna try out?"

Does he want to try out? To be in a band with his old bully, who he's not sure can even play and who seems to have no real plan for the band who's last three drummers quit? Well, at least they have the space and equipment. And he's got nothing better to do. He may as well, at least he'll get to play drums today, he kind of hates not being able to play every day anymore.

"Sure."

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"How come everyone but me have their lives figured out?"

"Everyone doesn't. And you said you didn't want to have it all figured

out," Barb tells her again and tops off her second glass of wine.

"No I meant I didn't want like my next 20 years planned out for me," she reiterates. "Still I'd like to at least know what... I'd like to do. You do. And Allie does. Hell I think even Mike knows what he wants to do, write stories. That's his thing. Like saving lives is gonna be your thing. Why don't I have a thing? I want to have a thing."

"You do. I know it and you know it too, come on Nance."

"No."

"Yes you do. I've known you since kindergarten. I've never seen you happier and more at ease than any time you're singing."

"Well I-"

"Already in choir. And you told me yourself, the one good day you had in New York was the open mic night."

"Okay... okay but I mean like a real thing... that I could do, for like a living."

"Why can't you do that for a living?"

"Gee why don't I go off and be renowned singer? Same reason I haven't been to space yet. I'd like to have some attainable goal, not just childhood pipe dreams."

"Okay, well first off I think being a singer won't be as hard as becoming an astronaut, but I think you could do either one if you applied yourself Nance. Second of all, why is it so unattainable? You could do it, don't let all your dad's talk about realistic expectations and stability get in your head."

"Hey I'm not like my dad!"

"I don't think so either, but if you don't do stuff because you don't want to take risks your less yourself and more like him. Third of all, I know this will sound hypocritical coming from me given I was right alongside you all through school when we focused on grades and honors classes and achieving stuff but, I don't think you have to be so

goal-oriented all the time. Don't get me wrong, I think you'd be the best singer in the world if that's what you want to be, but you don't have to aim to be like the next Debbie Harry. For now I think you should just think about how singing makes you happy, and that it'd be nice to be happy after being miserable for so long. I want to see you happy."

Okay, just being happy actually sounds like a nice prospect right now. Barb may be right. Barb knows her so well. Sometimes better than she knows herself. Singing has always been... her favorite thing to do. But it was never the most important thing. Grades were always the most important thing, honors classes, valedictorian and making her parents proud were always the most important thing. Though her mom always liked her singing, her dad thought choir and stuff were "good things because extra curriculars pads out a college resume nicely". Singing was always a nice hobby, but not something you do. Being on stage in front of thousands of people, being the next Debbie Harry... for sure was something she's dreamt of. Kind of a lot. For years. But it's surely nothing that will ever happen.

But Barb is right that she is happy when she's singing. Always has been. She told Barb about when she, alone and miserable walking the streets of New York like some sad cliché, walked past a bar with a sign outside saying it was open mic night and on a whim going inside. She's still not sure why, maybe just 'cause she felt like she was on rock bottom and so miserable she had nothing to lose. She got on stage and did *Follow Me* and after the initial few bars, once she started to get lost in the music so she didn't have time to reflect anymore on how nervous she was, she for the first time since she went to New York felt happy, care-free, in the moment. To be honest she felt something she'd never felt before, it was more than just the joy of singing she got from singing in choir in high school or to herself in her room constantly, this was much more exhilarating. It was her, just her, in front of people, singing and it felt so good, even before the song was over and people started applauding she knew she had nailed it, she just felt so in tune she thought even if everyone else had hated, which they clearly didn't because the reception was kind of overwhelming, she at least liked it herself. And the applause and people afterwards coming up to her saying she was amazing and asking if she was in a band or something was a very nice validation

to get after months and months of crippling self-doubt (the guys who blatantly came up to hit on her was another thing though).

"Right... you're right. Being happy would be nice. But what should I do really?"

"I don't know, but you can crash here while you figure that out. Because I assume you don't wanna go back to Hawkins?"

"God no, never."

"Right. I do think you should tell your parents about dropping out sooner rather than later though."

"I will tell them... at some point."

"Before or after they call NYPD because they keep calling you and getting no answer?"

"At some point!"

---

"Work is good. Terry and Becky and Jane say hi, by the way," he lets his mom know in response to the standard question he gets every week when he's home visiting.

They've just sat down for dinner, he offered to help out but his mom insisted it wasn't necessary and instead he'd sat with Will who was excited to show him he had learned to play *This Charming Man* on his guitar. It sounded great. Will has always been much more talented than him, he's sure he'll be the one with a chance to really make it with music and can't wait to see how far he'll go.

"That's nice, I'm so happy you found them. But so how are you sweetie, any news?"

"Uh yeah actually, I've found a band to play with."

"Oh really? That's wonderful!"

"Cool! What band?" Will looks up from his plate excitedly.



"Oh it's new, don't even really have a name or anything yet but, uh you remember Steve Harrington?" He asks his mom even though it's a dumb question, everyone knows the Harringtons since Mr. Harrington owns like half the town.

"Of course, Charles and Patricia's boy right? He was the year above you in school right?"

"Yeah, uh anyway it's his band. Him and this other guy Mark. They put up flyers looking for a drummer and I saw one of the flyers at the bar so I went and tried out and got it."

"Wow really, I didn't know he was musical?"

"Isn't he an asshole?" Will bluntly asks.

"Will!" Their mom admonishes.

"I mean he used to be," he interjects. "In school but uh, he seems pretty alright now, I mean he was nice to me now and I don't know, didn't seem so full of himself like he was in school."

"I didn't know he lived in Chicago now."

"Yeah me neither. But he was working there, in the building we play in. Um, so his dad apparently bought the whole building, and among other things there used to be a record label there and the recording studio is still there so Steve's got all the equipment on hand."

"Oh, well that's certainly handy."

"Yeah. To be honest he's not really that good. He plays guitar, he said his mom made him take lessons when he was a kid but he only recently started again when he got the job. Which is uh, obvious. Mark who plays bass is good though. And I don't know, it's just nice to be playing again. Not sure anything will come off it but I'm just happy to have a place to play."

"That's great honey! And hey, you never know, having a studio and everything is real professional at least, maybe this will lead to something great, maybe Steve will get better?"

"Yeah, maybe."

"You gotta show me studio sometime!"

"Sure buddy, next time."

---

Barb gets back from class just as she's draining the pasta. She's been crashing on Barb's couch for days now, and Barb has lent her money while she looks for a job, so to at least give something back to her best friend she's been making dinner all week and cleaning the small apartment.

"Hello dear, smells lovely. I love having a wife," Barb jokes when she enters the kitchen.

"Ha ha. Should I then be worried that some Jodie called earlier asking for you. Is she *the other woman*?" She retorts, dramatically feigning jealousy while really being quite intrigued as to how Barb's love life is fairing at college after getting out of little and close-minded Hawkins.

"Oh," Barb gets a little red-faced, to her pleasure, at that. "What uh, what did she want?"

"Well, after I was able to convince her that I was your best friend, not another girl – wow was it awkward when I first answered your phone – she told me to tell you that she had a great time last Saturday and if you were free this weekend and if you could call her back later."

"Oh, okay. Nice."

"... so?"

"So what?"

"Well, tell me about her!"

"Not much to tell, I met her at the university library. She's a chemistry major, we went out for drinks, it was nice."

"Nice, so when do I get to meet her? I can only judge her so much by

a phone call."

"Or you can not judge her at all?"

"Hey this is what we do! We know each other well, and we know well enough to listen to the other. Like I listened to you about Steve and broke it off — and you were right, he was just trying to get with me to get another notch on his bedpost. And you listened to me about Robin!"

"Right. To be fair I didn't turn Robin down because you thought she was pretentious but because she thought you were a priss."

"Still I'm honored you chose me over like, the only other lesbian in Hawkins."

"The only one we knew of in high school at least. And you should be."

"I said I am! So, when do I meet Jodie? She sounded nice over the phone. After the initial awkwardness."

"We'll see how this weekend goes. Thanks for dinner by the way."

"No problem, how was your day?"

"It was fine. How did job hunting go today?"

"Well, I got to more places than yesterday. And got more no's."

"Ah well. Just gotta keep plugging away at it. Eventually someone will hire you."

"I suppose. Somewhere out there someone is sure to be looking for a college dropout with minimal job experience."

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"Wow, this place is nice. So Steve works here and you get to play here for free?" Will wonders when they go through the front door.

"Yeah, he's a janitor. He's really not that bad anymore. I think getting out of high school and not being the king anymore was good for him, knocked him down a few pegs."

"Right. I never thought you'd be friends with a guy like Steve Harrington. It'd be like me being friends with Troy."

"Hey, he still giving you trouble?"

"Not so much anymore, I'm just saying."

"Right. Anyway-"

"Woah, awesome!" Will looks like a kid in a candy store when he enters the studio and sees all the equipment. Not like it's the most lavish studio, but still it's much more than either of them are used to.

"I know, right? You can plug into that amp over there," he points out and Will lightning fast opens his guitar case and gets out the second hand Telecaster he and his mom saved up for to give Will for his 13th birthday along with a cheap small amplifier. Will has played it every day since.

He gets behind the drums and they start to jam. He's really, really missed this, playing with his brother. Granted he's only played with Steve and Mark a few times so maybe it's question of it taking some time to find their groove, but he doubts it will ever feel as nice and effortless as this. He just feels so in sync with Will, playing with him is his favorite thing to do.

They've played for about fifteen minutes, rolling through an odd medley of some Smiths songs, and some Bowie, added on with some improvisations they naturally find; when the studio door opens and Steve enters, looking surprised to see them.

"Oh, hey Byers. Didn't know you'd be here today."

"Hey Steve, hope it's okay, it's my day off and my brother is visiting and he wanted to see the place."

"Right no sure, it's cool. You guys sound good. You play really good um..."

"Will," Will fills in his name.

"Will. Real good."

"Thanks."

"Um... uh well now that I have you here Byers, some news I was gonna tell you um, so Mark's out."

"What?"

"Mark's out of the band. He's moving to Phoenix, his girlfriend got a job there and he's going with her."

"Oh. So... what do we do now?"

"I don't know, look for a new bassist I guess. Hey little man, can you play bass?"

"Yeah? Bass is easy."

"Cool so you want-"

"But I'm a guitarist. I wanna play guitar."

"Well, I'm the guitarist. It's my band."

"Whatever then. Are you even any good, can I hear you play?" Will's forwardness makes him chuckle. His brother has always been a straightshooter even though he's always been very nice and polite.

"Hey, sure dude," Steve looks slightly offended to be challenged by a 15 year old and picks up a guitar.

Steve doesn't play for long before Will is shooting him looks over the drum set, and Jonathan isn't surprised. The trouble with Steve's guitar playing really is that he does too much. He's actually steady on holding a rhythm and all that, but he thinks he's Jimmy Page or something and plays way too over the top, much more than he's really able to handle, missing notes and making a mess out of the complicated solos he insists on constantly launching into.

"Wow," Will deadpans when Steve finally stops.

"Impressed?" Steve asks, oblivious to Will's tone.

"Um, not really... why do you play like that? You're all over the place."

"Hey!"

"He's right you know, sorry. It's like Mark and I told you. You do too much."

They have talked about it, a lot. Every jam session they've had since he got his spot in the band has dissolved into bickering about Steve's way of playing. They've barely been able to get through a song without Steve screwing up or falling behind or launching into a crazy unnecessary and bad solo. Plus Steve's vocals and the lyrics to the two songs he's written himself is ridiculous. He can see why all the previous drummers quit. And he's started to question why he even bothers sticking around. Even more now with the news of Mark leaving, he gelled pretty good with Mark.

"I don't want to hear it, it's my band."

Especially with the attitude Steve still has, though he's much nicer than he was in high school he gets defensive when his skill is questioned. He's sort of feels done with this now, with Mark gone and a bunch of bad jam sessions behind him. He knows nothing will ever come of this, playing in a band with Steve on vocals and guitar.

"Whatever man, but to be honest we'll never make it like this," he sighs. As he's speaking, looking from Steve to Will and reflecting once more on how different it feels playing with Will, he throws out a thought. "It's your band but why do you have to be the guitarist?"

"What, you want me to just sing, not play?"

"Uh... not really that either but we'll get to that later maybe," he quickly mumbles before continuing. "I mean, can't you try playing bass instead, and Will plays guitar?"

"What?" Both Steve and Will blurts out at once, looking from him to each other.

"You want me in the band?"

"You want to replace me with your little brother?"

"Yes Will, if you want to. And no, not replace, I'm just saying... he's a better guitarist than you Steve. And I think you can be a good bassist. You can carry a rhythm, and it's similar to guitar, but would suit you better I think."

"But who cares about a bassist? I wanna be a rock star. Name one famous rock star who played bass."

"Paul McCartney, Phil Lynott, Dee Dee Ramone, Paul Simonon, Sid Vicious?" Will throws out off the top of his head.

"Yeah and look man, you gotta stop just thinking about image, are you only in this band because you want to be some famous rock star or because you want to make music? Because I want to make music."

"I want to make music too! Still, a bassist..."

"The bassist is crucial. Bass and drums is any band's spine. We carry the whole thing, if the drums and bass screw up the whole band is screwed so, we need someone steady and confident on bass. I think you can be that. You'd still be the leader of the band, you'd just play bass instead of guitar."

"Hm I don't know..."

"Look can we at least try it?"

"I don't know the bass parts to songs..."

"Yes you do, just do like Mark did. We can just do one of the songs we've been rehearsing to, you know the chords already. Like we'll do uh... how about *I Wanna Be Sedated*? Will knows that too."

"Alright man, whatever, to get you off my back..."

He counts them in and they launch into the Ramones classic he's played so many times both with Will and with Steve and Mark. But not like this. By the end of the first verse he and Steve are looking at each other and he's pretty sure Steve feels the same thing he does, that for the first time really there's a real musical spark between

them. They sound *good*. Perfectly in rhythm, it feels like all three of them are connecting on a very real, intuitive level. Steve still flubs the vocals but that doesn't really matter.

"That was awesome," Will affirms when they finish.

"Yeah, see man that was great, way better than before."

"Yeah that was... huh, that was something I guess," Steve nods. "And I guess you're right... the bassist really is the band's spine..."

He lets Steve have that one, doesn't point out that he left out the drums, because he can sense where he's going.

"So... you in on this? You switch to bass?"

"Yes... and Mini Byers?"

"Will..." Will rolls his eyes.

"Right, Will, uh you sound real good on guitar so... welcome to the band. I mean, if you want... wait how old are you?"

"15."

"Oh... well why not, I guess. You in?"

"Um..." Will looks from Steve to him and smirks. "I mean yeah, if you guys want me... and Jonathan is cool with driving to Hawkins to get me all the time? And maybe talk to mom about this so she doesn't worry..."

"Of course buddy," he smiles.

"Awesome! Steve and the Gutwrenchers are complete again, and we didn't even have to audition new guys!"

"Steve and the what now?" Will asks, his eyebrows raised way up his forehead.

"Yeah about the name, Steve..." he starts.

"Okay okay you gotta stop giving me grief about that, at least until



you come up with a better suggestion."

"Right right..." he puts a pin in that fight for now, to focus on another. "But also um, about auditions, I was thinking, regarding vocals..."

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She's spent all day hitting up cafés, restaurants, bars and shops handing in resumes, looking for any work. Walking towards the exit of yet another café she's sure will reject her she stops at a notice board where a flyer catches her eye.

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Remembering what she and Barb arrived at during their talk her first night in the city, that she's happy when she's singing and simply being happy would be nice, she jots down the address in the notebook she always carries with her where she writes down little poems and lyrics no one ever gets to see.